WHIRRAKEE

August 2008 Vol. 29 No. 7

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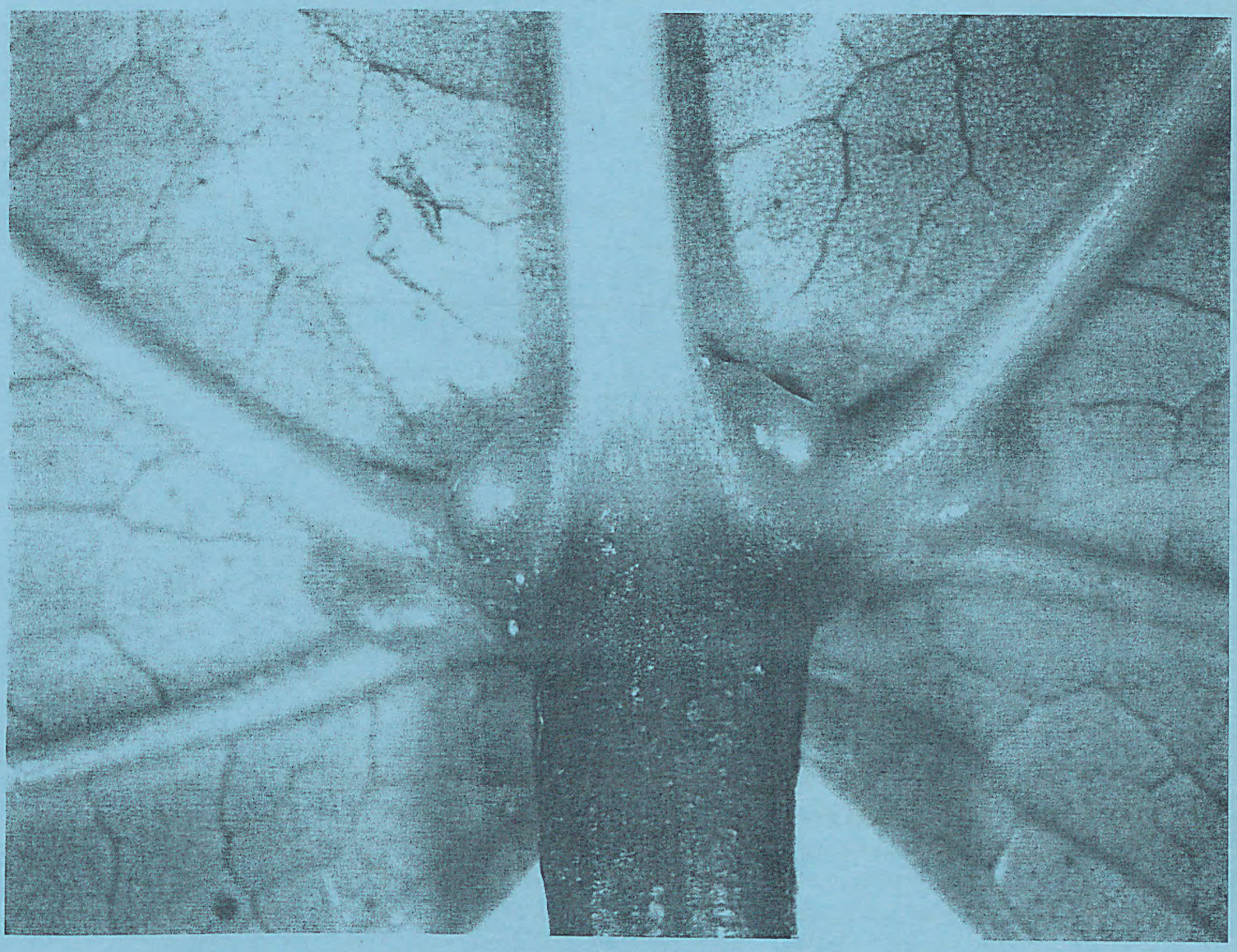

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552
ISSN 0812-423X

Office Bearers for 2007 - 2008

President	Glenise Moors	Mandurang South Road, Sedgwick	54396254
Senior Vice President	Richard Goonan		0423 418815
Junior Vice President	Matthew Comer		0409 162627
Secretary	Anne Bridley		5449 3479
Minute Secretary	Peter Ellis and Jan Orr		
Treasurer	Rob Moors		
Membership Officer	Anne Bridley		5449 3479
Excursion organiser	Richard Goonan		0423 418815
Syllabus organiser	Rod Orr	2 Cockerel Court, Bendigo	5443 5668
	(an assistant's position for the syllabus organiser is still vacant)		
Librarian (t.b.c.)	Diana Collier	31 Milroy Street, Bendigo	5443 0137
Garden Convenor/Secretary	Matthew Comer		0409 162 627
Hall Management	Maurie Lewis (assisted by Bill Holsworth and Kath Thompson)		0407 427179
Whirrakee contact	Sabine Wilkens	82 Somerville Street, Bendigo e-mail: s.wilkens@latrobe.edu.au	5443 2797

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The invited speaker at general meetings starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper.
If a workshop is held prior to the meeting, it will be advertised and it usually starts at 7.00pm.
The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Bob Ruddick, Rod Orr, Jan Orr, Peter Ellis, Ben Goonan, Anthony Sheean, Stuart Fraser, Liz Graham

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. In addition to local excursions, campouts are held several times each year, usually coinciding with long weekends or holiday periods.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one active group that meets regularly (the Fauna Study Group) and other groups that meet at irregular intervals.

Fauna Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.
Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Bird Observers Group: This group has field excursions and the occasional lecture evening. Please consult the *Whirrakee* for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5449 3479.
To propose meetings or excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club
Vol. 29, No. 7, August 2008
Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

CONTENT

Item	Contributor	Page
Short notices		3
July General Meeting Speaker: Chris Tzaros	Sabine Wilkens	4
Sand Monitor observation	Bob Semmens	5
From the mailbag	Elaine Mathison	6
Lizards of the Bendigo District Part 5B: Skinks	Darren Green	7
Warning	via Clive Fisher	10
Speaker Syllabus for the remainder of 2008	Rod Orr	10

Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgement should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note
With this issue you would have got a form to renew your membership for the period October 2008 – September 2009 (please do this as soon as possible), and one to encourage you to nominate someone for the Annual General Meeting in September. Do consider nominating somebody (with their consent) or nominating yourself for the various positions we have on offer. For a list of positions, see the inside front cover of the Whirrakee. All positions are open for nominations. The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is a fantastic organization that has taken part or been instrumental in the conservation of much of our bushland. Take an active part in it!

Front Page Illustration – Photographer: Glenys Shirley
This is the underside of a leaf of *Cissus antartica*, Water Vine or Kangaroo Vine. The Council gardeners found it growing on the Fernery fence in Rosalind Park - they were surprised because nobody had noticed it growing there or remembered it being planted so, of course, they suspected that it was an alien growing weedily. Rod Orr identified it, and everyone was relieved when he discovered that it was an Aussie native creeper from NSW and Qld rainforests. The extra-interesting thing about this plant is the presence of small, bulgy 'pockets' along the leaf axils. These are called 'domatia' and they normally house small arthropodss (e.g. mites or ants) that often act as cleaners and disinfectant for the plant. They scurry over the leaf picking up potentially harmful fungal spores or bacteria and, in return, get a little house to live in. Perfect!

Short notices

There will be a garden working bee

on Saturday 9th August

at 9am

to carry out weeding

and general maintenance.

All very welcome

Friends of Kooyoora Inc Wildflower Show
The Friends of Kooyoora Inc Wildflower Show is planned for 20th/21st September 10am-4pm in the Rheola Hall, Kingower/Rheola Road.
Display of local wildflowers collected with DSE permit, plus static displays and photographs.
We always enjoy visits from Field Nats so would love to see some of your members.
Jill McFarlane

The FJC Rogers Seminar is hosted this year by the APS and SGAP Victoria in Horsham (Horsham College Assembly Hall). The topic this year is **Eremophilas**
Date: 4th and 5th October, registration starts at 9am.
More information is at
http://www.apsvic.org.au/fjcrogers.html
or by phoning 03 5381 0081

This Seminar is for enthusiasts of Australian plants, and all gardeners who want to have an attractive garden with low water use.

More rescuers and telephone operators are needed for the Wildlife Rescue & Information Network
After 11 years of operation, WRIN has found that its workload has increased to the point that more rescuers and telephone operators are needed.
Training will be provided by experienced WRIN members and any time that can be given will be most appreciated.
If you feel that you can help, the Rescue phone no is 0419 356433
or email secretary@wrin.asn.au

Hamilton Field Naturalists Club
50th Anniversary Celebrations
Saturday 23 August - Sunday 24 August 2008 includes excursions in the Hamilton, southern Grampians area and dinner on Saturday night
contact: Diane Luhrs 55723874 or e-mail hamiltonfnc@live.com.au

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Field Naturalist Club of Victoria
FNCV Biodiversity Symposium 2008
Sunday 14 September
Topic: Birds and the Urban Environment
contact: Mary Gibson 92517466 or e-mail maryg@deakin.edu.au

Friends of the Box-Ironbark Forests
(Mount Alexander region) **Bushwalks 2008**
All walks are on Sundays. Meet 9.30 am outside 30 Templeton Street, Castlemaine (Continuing Ed.) and carpool to the start of the walk. Take water, morning tea and lunch. Non-members welcome. No cost. (Walks are cancelled on Total Fire Ban days). For more information ring Bronwyn Silver on5475 1089
17 August Dry Diggings Trail
Follow part of the Dry Diggings Trail to the Monk and back via Monk's Hill Track. The route takes in some interesting historical features and hopefully some early wild-flowers. Finish at the fascinating People and Places display in the Chewton Town Hall (entry by gold coin donation). 5-6 km. For more information ring Helen McGeachin 5472 3990.

July General Meeting
Speaker: Chris Tzaros 'The Orange-bellied Parrot, Australia's rarest bird'

Chris Tzaros is well-known to most Club members, either as an avid young member of the Club's bird group, as the author of the comprehensive box-ironbark book or from his important work on the Orange-bellied Parrot with the organisation 'Birds Australia'. In July, Chris returned to Bendigo to talk about the latter project, one which has consumed his interest and energy over the last 3-4 years.

Not only is the Orange-bellied Parrot *Neophema chrysogaster*, Australia's rarest bird, it is also one of the world's most endangered species.
The known population is estimated at only 50 breeding pairs with a total of 140 individuals.

This species is one of only two migratory parrots in the world, the other is the Swift Parrot, another of Chris' favourites.

The Orange-bellied Parrot (or OBP) breeds in South-west Tasmania in remote wilderness areas around Melaleuca, with another breeding population occurring at Birches Inlet. It nests in tree hollows and luckily also takes to nest boxes, which have been erected as part of the ongoing recovery effort. It breeds between November and February in Tasmania.

Following the breeding period, it migrates along the south-west coast of Tasmania, using the Bass Strait Islands, e.g. King Island, to hop over to mainland South-East Australia, where they over-winter. Occasionally, they have been found as far north as Sydney, but are normally found between the Coorong and Corner Inlet. The birds reach their greatest numbers at only four sites, Lake Connewarre, Spit Reserve, Swan Island and the Western Treatment Plant, or at least, they used to be seen regularly at these sites.
However, between 1987 and 2007, the species has suffered massive declines and maximum counts at the various sites went from 50 down to less than 10.

Why is this bird in such trouble?

Habitat issues in their breeding range could play a small part. Disturbance there is deliberately minimised, but a changed fire regime in Tasmania, and the response of local plants to this, is very likely to affect this seed eater. However, on the mainland, in their over-wintering range, habitat destruction and degradation must play a major part in reducing the survival chances of this species. Coastal salt marshes are getting rarer and rarer, refineries become established, cattle graze, much rubbish is dumped, housing developments encroach and invasion by weedy plants like *Spartina* prevent the birds' food plant recruitment. Bigger issues still are frequent droughts that prevent flushing of salt marshes, as well as impending sea level and climate change.

99% of the birds occur within 5 km of the coast, 81% within 2 km, so this is a truly coastal species. If salt marshes would normally be driven inland in response to rising sea level, in coastal S-E Australia, they have nowhere to go. This prospect is in fact the biggest challenge for the managers of this endangered bird.

Beaded Glasswort, *Sarcocornia quinqueflora*, with its tiny seeds, is a key food plant, yet sites rich in this plant are not utilised by the parrot. Another food plant is Shrubby Glasswort, *Sclerostegia*, as well as *Chenopodium* and *Acaena* (bidgee-widgee). Occasionally, the birds are also seen feeding on *Sueda australis*, millet, plantain and wireweed.

Apart from food plants, tall and dense roosting plants are also needed. Native plants like Coastal and Golden Wattle as well as Coastal Beard Heath are known to provide shelter, but occasionally African Boxthorn is used. This is a much hated woody weed, but there is a case of leaving some individuals intact in locations where they are known to be used by Orange-bellied Parrots.

Intense roost monitoring occurs throughout the winter to identify suitable sites as well as studies of landscape features that suit the bird and might allow their expansion into presently 'underused' environments. Some such environments seem good, but no OBP records have been returned from these.

The volunteers associated with this project represent a formidable workforce and the many surveys could never happen without them. Survey efforts have much increased in the past years, yet less and less birds are spotted, even at traditional sites where they occurred reliably. Either the birds are declining further, or they are using other areas along the coast. There is some weak evidence of the latter, but it is too early to tell for sure. Volunteers are not just looking for birds, there is now also a concentrated effort to study landscape features and attributes of favourable habitats, to give clues as to where to look for alternative sites should the birds continue to disappear from their traditional areas.

Questions that still need to be answered are, at what scale does the bird select its habitat? Is it at the site- or microscale level (e.g. local vegetation including its colour) or is it at larger scales, the regional or landscape scale or beyond?

There is still a lot to do. The landscape monitoring results need to be published in a forum where land managers in particular have access to it. Management plans need to be prepared and community understanding need to be stepped up.

What about captive breeding? This started 12 years ago and has been successful in several places in Australia. Some captive bred birds have been released to top up wild populations. It is a very risky business as diseases are common in captive colonies and releasing diseased birds would be a disaster.

Is it worth going to so much trouble for a single species, you might ask? Chris, in fact, pointed out how ideal this bird is as a case study for the benefits of single species management. The bird has been a perfect ambassador for coastal conservation. Preserving landscape for this one species, will undoubtedly benefit many other species as well. It is a very sad and sobering thought, that this beautiful parrot might disappear in the lifetime of the Club's younger members, but in trying to save it, many other species might lead a more secure life and have their chances of survival improved.

Thanks Chris for doing the work and telling us about it in such an inspiring way.

If anybody wants to know more about the project, where it is at and how they can become involved, contact Chris Tzaros at Birds Australia on 03 9347 0757 or e-mail him at c.tzaros@birdsaustralia.com.au

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Sand Monitor observation

by Bob Semmens

I have found Darren Green's various articles re reptiles most interesting and would like to relate observations while a ranger at Wyperfeld National Park in north-west Victoria. I encountered the Sand Monitor *Varanus gouldii* several times and it certainly is an impressive sight when raised on hind legs and tail for a look around if disturbed. Occasionally in season, I would find one soaking up warmth from the sealed road into the campground and instead of making for the nearest tree as per a lace monitor, it would flatten out and stay put presumably for disguise. I was quite concerned as a holiday period was approaching and sure enough found it had been run over by a vehicle.

Perhaps this trait is the reason many are found as road-kill as stated in Darren's article, so best be wary of that flat strip of 'bark' on the road if driving in their range in season, as it may be one of those handsome Sand Monitors thermo-regulating and reluctant to move.

From the Mailbag
Author: Elaine Mathison

Each month the club receives a number of newsletters and magazines: some by subscription and some in exchange for Whirrakee. These are available from the club library.

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THE BIRD OBSERVER(BOCA)
June 2008

- 'Threatened Birds and Threatening Processes' was the theme of a scientific day held in March at Monash University
- Swift Parrot: Chris Tzaros and Belinda Cooke report on the ongoing monitoring of this endangered species. Surveys have been conducted on the mainland of Australia since 1995
- A Panoply of Penguins: deals with the Rockhopper Penguins in the Falkland Islands and Macaroni Penguins in nearby South Georgia

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THE VICTORIAN NATURALIST (FNCV)
April 2008

"Studies on Victorian bryophytes": the liverwort genus *Treubia* Goebel is represented in Victoria by a single species, *Treubia tasmanica*.

"Golden Sun Moth": this diurnal moth is considered to be critically endangered in Australia. A survey around Melbourne in 2006-07 has discovered several new populations.

"Surveys of vertebrate fauna in the Grampians National Park, 2003-2007" recorded 114 species, including 30 mammals, 17 reptiles, 3 amphibians and 65 birds. Four threatened species were found.

* * * * * * *

AUSTRALIAN MAMMALOGY
(Aust. Mammal Society) April 2008

- A new species of hopping-mouse from cave deposits in the Flinders and Davenport Ranges
- Age estimation of pouch young and growth of the burrowing bettong, Shark Bay, W.A.
- Diet and breeding of the rufous spiny bandicoot, Iron Range, Cape York Peninsula
- Distribution, habitat and conservation status of the eastern pygmy-possum in Tasmania
- A new trap design for capturing squirrel gliders and sugar gliders

* * * * * * *

MAKING A DIFFERENCE - Weeds and Pests on Public Lands Initiative 2003-07 (DSE) reports on the programs undertaken during this period throughout Victoria to assist with control of various invasive weeds and feral animals. Many community and school groups were involved in these activities.

* * * * * * *

Also received recently:

*Geelong Naturalist (Geelong FNC)

*The Ballarat Naturalist (Ballarat FNC)

*Castlemaine Naturalist (C'Maine FNC)

*Sun-Nat (Sunraysia FNC)

*Field Nats News (FNCV)

*Plains Wanderer (Mid-Murray FNC)

*Conservation Bulletin (Trust for Nature)

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Lizards of the Bendigo District

Part 5B: Skinks

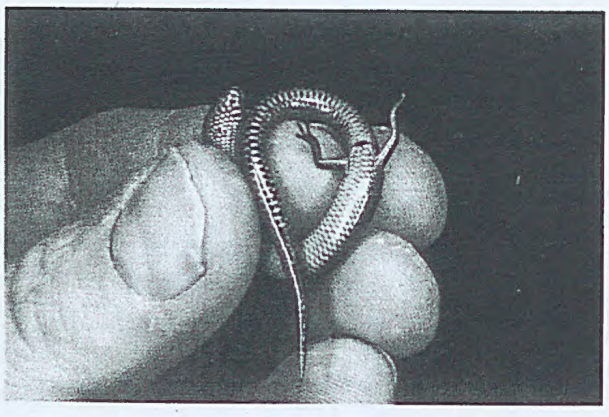
Author and Photographer: Darren Green

Editor's note: As this is a very large group, it was spread over two editions (Part 5A was in last month's Whirrakee).

Skinks *Scincidae*

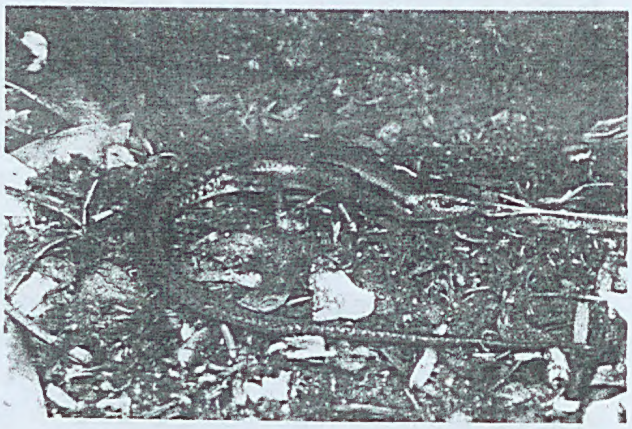
Skinks make up part of the largest family of lizards in the world. Their size ranges from several centimetres to almost 600mm in some species, however most are relatively small and are often termed 'drop tail lizards' by many people. Skinks are generally terrestrial, although some species have arboreal tendencies, although this is not distinctive of the species. Some have also adapted the ability to burrow, and spend a great deal of their lives underground. They are frequently encountered under rocks, fallen timber and other ground litter. Skinks are often overlooked although they are commonly encountered. Future research and surveys are required into this group of lizards, as it may show an increase in population range or species in the region. I find skinks to be one of the most amazing reptiles, so I have included a few facts so that you will develop an appreciation for them *(this long, and very interesting list of facts was published with Part 5A in the July edition)*

Three-toed earless Skink
Hemiergis decresiensis



A small burrowing lizard that reaches SVL 50mm. It is a rich brown colour above with a series of dark brown stripes or series of spots. The flanks are grey-brown with darker flecks and the underside is a distinct yellow, although this may be pale in some specimens. Limbs are relatively small. Some specimens have been erroneously identified as *Lerista bougainvillii*. This lizard is on the fringe of the Bendigo district with confirmed records at Mt. Kooyoora. It is typically found under rocks, in loose soil. Diet is insects and two young are born from February through to March.

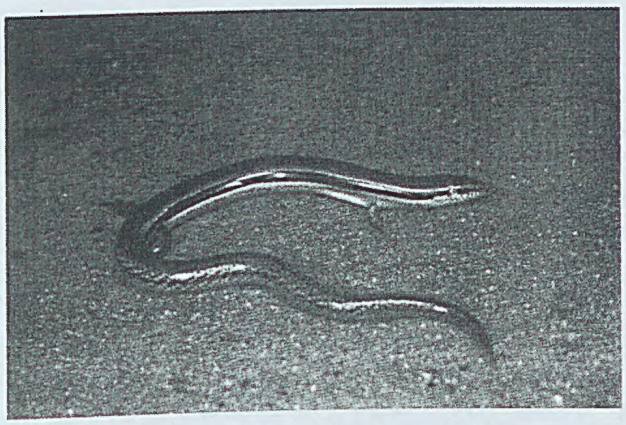
Garden Skink *Lampropholis guichenoti*



A small sized lizard reaching SVL 40 to 47mm. They may vary through shade of grey-brown, olive-brown or brown above with lighter spots, and a dark, faint to conspicuous vertebral stripe from the neck to the base of the tail. A dark brown upper lateral stripe commencing from the nose, extends from the eye to the base of the tail. The underside is scattered with white or pale brown scales, with some flecked with dark

brown. As their common name suggests, they are found in suburban gardens as well in areas that relatively bushfire free where populations may grow large. A common skink in the Bendigo area, with females depositing two to six eggs from late spring through summer. Feeds on small insects.

Bougainville's Skink ***Lerista bougainvillii***



A small lizard that may reach SVL 70mm. It is pale silver-grey to grey-brown above with dark brown flecks. A broad black upper dorso-lateral strip extend from the nostril, through the eye, above the limbs to the base of the tail, where it then breaks up to a series of variegations along the tail. Ventral surfaces are a pale cream or white, while the tail tends towards a pale orange. The scales are smooth and limbs are short, adapted for burrowing in loose soil beneath rocks and ground litter. It is typically found under rocks, in loose soil. They are found through a wide range of habitats and commonly encountered throughout the Bendigo area. One to four eggs are laid in summer.

Grey's Skink ***Menetia greyi***

A small skink attaining a SVL of 30 to 38mm. It is a bronze-brown to grey-brown above with four series of thin broken lines (or dashes) extending from the nape to the base of the tail. A broad blackish-brown dorso-lateral stripe begins from the nostril, through the eye, above the front limb and extends to the rear limb. This stripe is bordered above with a pale zone, and below by a creamy white stripe from the snout to just behind the forelimb. Flanks are the same colour as above, while the ventral surfaces are cream to yellow, being paler on the throat, occasionally with fine longitudinal lines of dark brown. Breeding males may be seen to display a slightly orange throat and chest. It is similar in appearance to *Morethia boulengeri*, excepting it is a smaller lizard with smooth glossy scales. Not commonly encountered in the Bendigo region, however further surveys may prove this wrong. Records are from Inglewood, Kamarooka, Maiden Gully, and Diamond Hill. Typically two eggs are laid from November to late January, with possible double clutches.

Boulenger's Skink ***Morethia boulengeri***

A small lizard, with adults reaching SVL 45 to 58mm. It is grey or brown above, usually with scattered dark and light flecks, while the tail is a rich brown. A narrow white strip extends from the upper labial scales to the groin, which is bordered above by a broad, black stripe and below by a obscure dark area. Ventral surface is white, however the throat and tail may be flushed with orange-pink. This skink is perhaps the most widespread

and commonest lizard throughout the Bendigo area. It is found in, or adjacent to, almost every habitat in the area. Females lays one to six well developed eggs in spring to early January. Juveniles have an orange tail that fades with age.

Eastern Blue-tongued Lizard
Tiliqua scincoids

A large familiar lizard attaining an impressive SVL300 to 370mm. It is a pale silver-grey with a series of dark brown, transverse cross-bands on the body. The flanks have a series of cream to orange blotches, which may rise and divide the darker bars on top. The limbs are relatively short, but are capable of moving fast. They feed on a wide variety of plant material including flowers and fruits, as well as insects, snails and baby mice. They are frequently found around human dwellings where they are attracted to various sources of food. Similarly they may be found throughout the Bendigo area, in a wide variety of habitats. If provoked, they will become defensive, opening their mouth in readiness to bite. They are capable of giving a painful bite if fingers get too close. They are live-bearing, with females giving birth to around 8 to 12 young, although they have been known to produce more.

Shingleback Lizard
Trachydosaurus rugosus

A large well-known lizard attaining a SVL 250 to 310mm. They are readily distinguished by their large, rugose scales, triangular shaped head and short stumpy tail. These lizards are also known as stumpies, although many variations do occur with its common name. They are variable in colour, typically variations of brown and black, with blotches of creams. The under-scales are smooth, limbs are short. If provoked, they will become defensive, opening their mouth in readiness to bite and hissing loudly, they are capable of giving a painful bite. Contrary to their sleepy nature, these lizards can move rapidly if they have the need to.

Acknowledgements
I wish to acknowledge my old 'herping' partner Dale Gibbons who graciously bestowed his knowledge and records.

References
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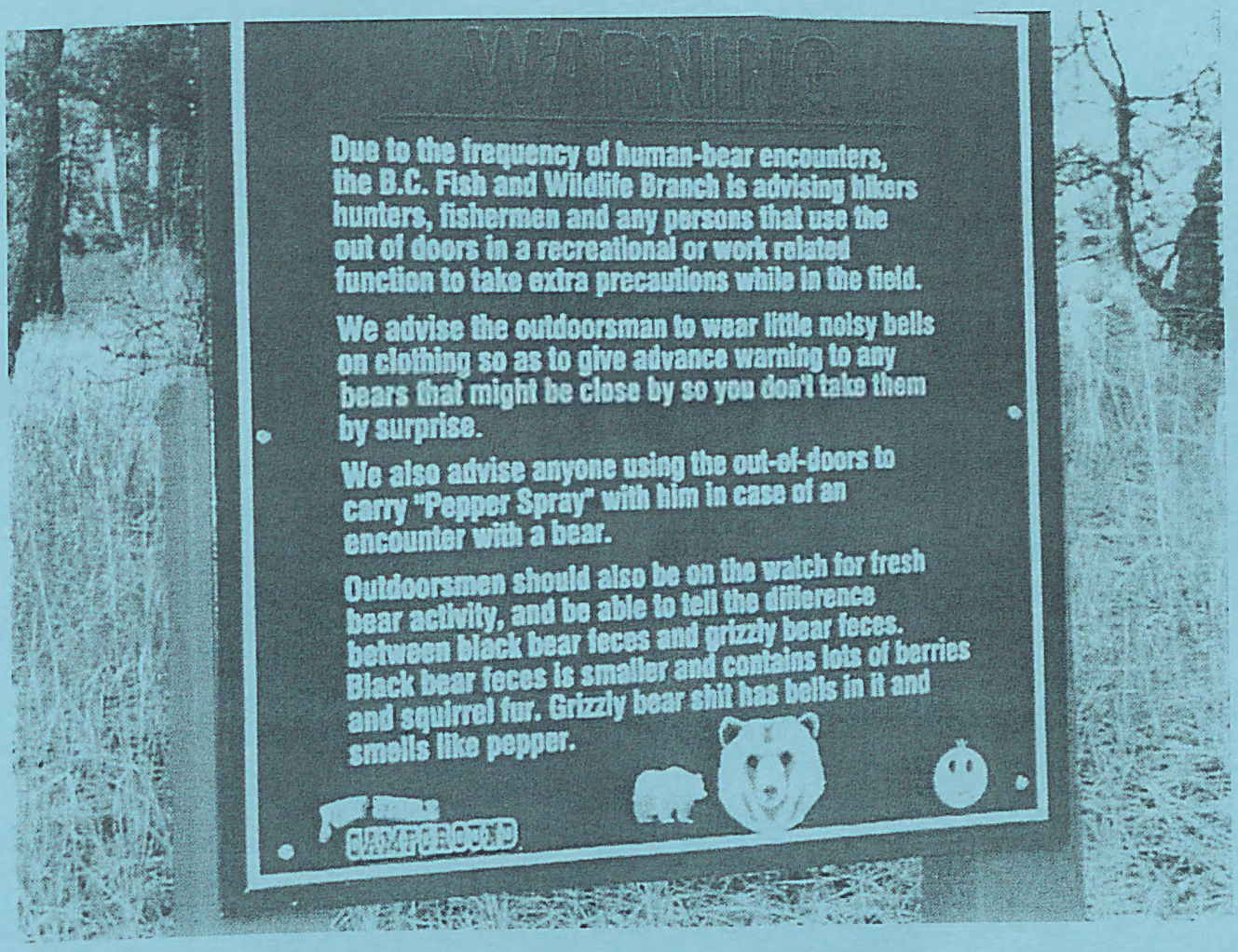
EHMANN, H. (1992) *Encyclopaedia of Australian Animals: Reptiles*, Angus & Robertson, Australia.
WILSON, S.K., & KNOWLES, D.G. (1988) *Australia's Reptiles; A Photographic Reference to the Terrestrial Reptiles of Australia*, Collins Publishers, Australia.



This photograph was sent in by Clive Fisher. It was mailed to him by some travelling friends.

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club
Speakers and topics for General Meetings for the remainder of 2008

Month/date/time		Speaker and topic
October, 8	7.30pm	Paul Foley: 'Our first 50 years in space – some discoveries and achievements'
November,12	7.30pm	Jim Radford: 'Woodland birds and their habitat requirements'
December, 10	6.30pm	Christmas break-up. Shared dinner. Peter Ellis 'Folk Music' (please note, earlier starting time)

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Fauna Study Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meetings

Wednesday, August 13 7.30pm
Speaker: Phil Dyson: 'Amazing trees of the Kamarooka area'

Wednesday, September 10 7.30pm
AGM and President's address. Speaker: Glenise Moors (topic to be announced)

Excursions

Contact Richard Goonan if you have any comments, questions or ideas for excursions (ph 0423418815).

Fauna Group

This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm.

Wednesday, August 28 7.30pm
Topic for discussion to be determined.

Regular Fauna Excursions

Every Friday morning starting at around 9 to 9:30, the Fauna Group inspects nest boxes in the Spring Gully area. The excursions are led by Maurie Lewis, 16 Vains St. Golden Square. Phone 0407 427 179 or 5442 1813. Phone Maurie to confirm exact departure times and location. If you don't phone but go directly to Maurie's house and find nobody at the house between 9 and 9:30 then the excursion is not on.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.

W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

Field Naturalist Club of Victoria
FNCV Biodiversity Symposium 2008

Sunday 14 September
Topic: Birds and the Urban Environment
contact: Mary Gibson 92517466 or e-mail maryg@deakin.edu.au

Ringwood Field Naturalists Club
SEANA campout Badgers Ck Healesville
Oct 15-17 2008

Program - possible excursions to Murrundidi, Mt St Leonard, Badger Weir, Black Spur, Fernshaw, Cement Creek, Mt Donna Buang
Speaker at dinner Saturday 18 - Roger Elliot, author and botanist
Cost: $65
Accommodation: Participants responsible for own accommodation.
Registration due by August 31.
Contact: Peter Rogers 98016946 (president) or Ray Wall (treasurer) 98011037 email Ringwoodfnc@hotmail.com

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Friends of Kooyoora Inc Wildflower Show

The Friends of Kooyoora Inc Wildflower Show is planned for 20th/21st September 10am-4pm in the Rheola Hall, Kingower/Rheola Road.
Display of local wildflowers collected with DSE permit, plus static displays and photographs.
We always enjoy visits from Field Nats so would love to see some of your members.
Jill McFarlane

Hamilton Field Naturalists Club
50th Anniversary Celebrations

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contact: Diane Luhrs 55723874 or e-mail hamiltonfnc@live.com.au